

The Beggar's Opera: Muslim Beggar-Minstrels and Street Oral Poetry Theater in Northern Nigeria

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Introduction

In my use of the expression 'The Beggar's Opera' I am not actually referring to John Gray's 1728 three-act satirical ballad opera, which retains contemporary relevance and popularity. Instead, I am referring to street beggar-minstrels who perform a usually satiric opera, what I prefer to call operetta, as part of their performances, specifically in northern Nigeria—thus indeed upholding the fundamental principles of 'beggar's opera'. A definition of beggar-minstrels was given by authorities in old Northern Nigeria (1966: 103), who interpret the term to include 'all persons who shout the praises of any person whether or not they play musical instruments and sing.' Such minstrels who do shout out the praises of patrons while playing a particular instrument are referred to as *maroka* (praise-singers). As a result, 'both in Zaria (1960) and Kano (1966) regulations were issued, entitled "Control of Beggar-Minstrels", which considerably limited the freedom of the *maroka* (Andrzejewski 1985: 200).

In medieval Europe, minstrels were usually entertainers who created the genre of minstrel performances through song lyrics that told stories, often made-up for the moment. However while northern Nigerian Hausa beggar-minstrels are far removed from the European medieval minstrels, the minstrels I focus on nevertheless do share these same performative characteristics—alluding to the universality of the genre, regardless of era, or geographical location.

Minstrelsy as performance act in what I call spontaneous popular culture appears in many cultures—and essentially share the same characteristic. In ancient Japan beggar-minstrels, called *hokai*, provided entertainment and a blessing on a house in exchange for something to eat (Cranston 1993: 758). In India, Balwant Gari (1962: 208) reports that

As time passed [...] less dignified bards degenerated into wandering minstrels—half-beggar, half-singer fakirs—who practiced fortune-telling and kismet-reading, and went from house to house for bowls of rice, prescribing a pinch of "magic ashes".

The minstrels in Ethiopia—*azmari*—form a distinct professional group, composing their songs and singing them at events and festivals (Leslau 1952). The central focus of their performance on 'how to use the language to entertain and uplift his hearers. Indeed, their songs are not only a source of diversion, but often express public opinion' (102). Their uniqueness, however, is their possession of secret language codes that enabled them to communicate to members of their profession in an exclusive manner.

In Bangladesh, minstrelsy is performed by Bauls, mystical and living in rural Bangladesh and West Bengal in India. They live near a village or most often travel from place to place ‘earn their living from singing to the accompaniment of the *ektara*, the lute *dotara*, a simple one-stringed instrument, and a drum called *dubki*’ (Unesco 2005: 14) The Bauls, however, neither identify with any organized religion nor with the caste system, special deities, temples or sacred places. Their emphasis lies on the importance of a person’s physical body as the place where God resides. Bauls are admired for this freedom from convention as well as their music and poetry.

In Turkey, medieval minstrels—*halk ozani*—were the travellers who entertained their audience with songs accompanied by a stringed musical instrument, the *baglama*. As Kaya (2002: 46) states, ‘in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, some of these minstrels used to write and sing poems against the supremacy of the Ottoman dynasty over the peasantry.’ This, according to Kaya (2002) served as an inspiration in the formation of contemporary Turkish hip-hop in Berlin—a tradition that is deeply historical, because earlier antecedents to Turkish *halk-ozani* were the nomadic or half-nomadic *ask* who sing their own or other minstrels’ compositions and accompany themselves on a stringed instrument called a *saz* (Başgöz 1952).

Even when the genre evolved into the minstrel show, or minstrelsy, as an American entertainment form consisting of comic skits, variety acts, dancing, and music, performed by white people in blackface or, especially after the American Civil War, black people in blackface (Bean 1996), the central structure of minstrelsy in African performing groups maintain the same comedic structure. Thus the unexpected, the swift repartee, the ludicrous are all worked into the song and narratives of the minstrel with skill and precision (Reck 1976: 29). Subsequently, the creative freedom of the minstrel in whatever setting, gives him the poetic license to take pot-shots at the society or social events.

Music in Hausa Social Contexts

An essential tension exists between Muslim Hausa public culture and popular culture. Public culture reflects the quintessential Hausa social makeup with its agreed boundaries defined by cultural specificity such as dress code, language and rules of social discourse. Hausa society, being structured on specific occupational hierarchies often considers music a low art form. As Besmer (1983: 32) pointed out,

The Hausa define musicians’ work as a craft (*sana’a*) called *roko* (lit. begging), and those engaged in it—instrumentalists, vocalists, praise-singers and -shouters—are called *maroka* (s. *maroki*) and ranked in the lowest social category. The essential aspect of *roko* is the type of service performed, that is, acclamation, and its social and economic circumstances. That instruments and music may be used in this service is irrelevant for the Hausa.

And as Podstavsky (1992: 1) further elucidates, ‘the specializations in this craft are used by their practitioners as vehicles to elicit material gifts from the public.’ Binding this craft is the concept of *ubangida*—a mentor, for whom the musician either sings exclusively, or is prompted by the mentor to sing for other patrons or events of mentor’s choice. It is this connection to a mentor that often denies Hausa music its innate creative impetus, giving it a client-focus. Yet his becomes necessary because it is the mentors’ patronage that provide income to the musician, especially in the absence of structured music marketing framework (which includes absence of

live concerts, club circuits gigs) in a deeply conservative society. A few international record companies such as EMI, Parlophone, Polydor had, in the 1960s recorded extensive catalogs of Hausa music—but were all forced to quit the Nigerian market in the 1970s due to changing government economic policies, as well as increased piracy due to availability of tape-cassette recorders. Musical appreciation can however be both low or high. For instance, the existence of complete orchestras in palaces of Hausa emirs from Zaria to Damagaram indicates the acceptance of music as an entertainment genre within the conventional establishment. Yet, it is not acceptable for the ruling class to engage in the same music—thus a prince cannot be a musician.

However, to understand the ‘music’ genre of the Hausa Muslim beggar-minstrels, it is necessary to provide deeper contextual background on the position of music as an entertainment form in Hausa culture.

The Genre of Hausa Music

In the main, Hausa music excels on its *vocal* qualities—with Hausa musicians producing songs of utter philosophical and poetic strength, reflecting Hausa proverbs—rather than instrumental virtuosity. This came about essentially because the Hausa use orality as an instrument of cultural expression. Thus the most distinctive characteristic of mainstream traditional Hausa musicians are their client-focused nature. They are either singing for a courtier, an emir, a wealthy person or an infamous person.. Even in what may be termed ‘orchestras’ comprising of many backing instrumentalists, the instruments tended to be of the same category—predominantly percussion. When Hausa societies became more cosmopolitan, and began to absorb influences from other cultures, mixed-mode instrumental groups started to appear, combining drums with a *goge*, *kukuma* (fiddles) leading the orchestra. Rarely are there musical combos with string, percussion and wind instruments in the *same* band.

Traditional Hausa music and musicians were often divided into specific categories, just like any music genre. In one of the most comprehensive studies of this categorization, Gusau (1996) in a biographical study of 33 Hausa classical to modernist musicians provided at least four categories. The first was *Makadan Yaki* (those who sang for armies) and who flourished from mid-19th century up to 1920. Singing for palace armies of Sokoto territories such as Gobir, Kebbi, and Argungu, these included Wari Mai Zarin Gobir (d. 1800), Ata Mai Kurya (d. 1899), Kara Buzu Mai Kan Kuwa (d. 1920), etc. Their instruments included *zari* (any piece of equipment used for musical tonation, e.g. a ring beaten with a metal rod), *kurya* (a variety of drum) and *molo* (a three-stringed ‘guitar’) each accompanied with a backing choir.

The second category extended the musical influences from 1900, and are referred to as *Makadan Sarakuna* (Palace musicians) – centering their musical instrumentation around drum orchestras in Emir’s palaces. Again found predominantly around Sokoto basin, these included Salihu Jankidi Sakkwato (1852-1973), Ibrahim Narambada Isa (1875-1960), Muhammadu Sarkin Taushin Sarkin Katsina (1911-1990), Musa Dan Kwairo (1909-1991), Sa’idu Faru (b.1932), and Sani Aliyu Dan Dawo Yauri (b. 1949) among others. Classicists of Hausa traditional music, their main music style was based on a variety of drumming accompanied by slow mournful and elegant vocals, as befitting one in the presence of royalty. The main drums were *kotso* (a drum

with only one diaphragm), *taushi* (a conical drum with only one diaphragm, beaten softly), *kuru* (a long drum about three feet long), *turu* (a large drum). Although predominantly court musicians, nevertheless they use their skills to sing about other issues such as political culture (mainly colonial independence), importance of traditional culture, and others.

The third category of traditional Hausa musicians was *Makadan Sana'a* (those who sing for members of specific guilds and professions). Perhaps the most famous of these was Muhammadu Bawa Dan Anace (1916-1986) whose main, although not exclusive, specialty was singing for Hausa traditional boxers, the most famous of whom was Muhammadu Shago. Dan Anace also sang for farmers and members of the aristocracy.

However, the most eclectic category was the fourth category, *Makadan Jama'a* (popular singers). Although often singing for Emirs and other gentry, their predominant focus was on ordinary people and their extraordinary lives. And while the other category of musicians tended to favor the drum in its various incantations, popular singers used a variety of musical instruments, and incorporate a variety of styles and subject matter—marking a departure from a closeted traditional society to a more cosmopolitan product of transnational flow of music influences.

These categories did not merge into each other historically, but rather even developed concurrently, with the last category, *Makadan Jama'a*, gaining predominance in recent years. Departing from the dominance of Sokoto musicians and the staid Emir's courts, popular folk musicians also adopted different instruments, rather than the predominantly percussion-based music of Emir's courts and occupational singers. Thus percussion instruments such as *duman girke*, *ganga*, *tauje*, *banga*, *taushi*, *kotso*, *turu*, *kalangu*, and *kwaira*; as well as wind instruments like *algaita*, *kakaki*, *kubumburuwa*; stringed instruments like *garaya*, *kuntigi*, *molo*, *kwamsa*, *goge*, *kukuma* all became the vogue among Hausa street and popular folk musicians up to 1970s.

Shata, for instance used the *kalangu* (an hour-glass shaped drum, or 'African' drum) orchestra; Dan Maraya Jos used *kuntigi* (a small, one-stringed instrument, a kind of fiddle). Equally diverse was their subject matter. Shata was predominantly a praise singer (*maroƙi*) for Emirs (*Sarkin Daura Mamman Bashar*), gentry (*Garban Bichi Dan Shehu*), 'peoples' heroes (*Bawa Direba*), women (*Kulu Mai Tuwo*), infamous (*Ammani Manajan Nija*), high life (*A Sha Ruwa*), civil servants (*Abba 33*), etc, having composed thousands of songs for all categories of people (see SHEME et al (2004) for a sample discography).

Dan Maraya Jos practices his craft on the other side of the spectrum. A folk singer, he refused to be client-focused and thus composed songs of poetic quality and beauty that reflect the vicissitudes of life. As he stated, 'all my songs convey specific messages to my audience. The majority of them are admonishments.' (Malumfashi, 2011: 20). Examples from his repertoire include *Wakar Sana'a* (virtues of gainful employment) *Dan Adam Mai Wuyar Gane Hali* (lamenting human nature), *Jawabin Aure* (married life), *Bob Guy* (the dude, a parody of drunkards and young urbanized males), *Ina Ruwan Wani Da Wani* (virtue of minding your own business), etc. He remained one of the few Hausa popular artistes with exposure beyond the confines of Nigeria, having performed as part of cultural exchange programs in US, UK, Cuba,

Barbados, Romania, Venezuela, Brazil and Bahrain. It is precisely because of his non-client focus that the Nigerian government found him a ready representative of Hausa performing arts when assembling Nigerian artistes for international cultural exchanges.

Hausa folk musicians with youth focus such as Dan Kashi (*Safiya Kano*), Amadu Doka (*Garba Tabako*), Garba Supa (*Amarya Anjo*), Hassan Wayam (*Sai Wayam*), Surajo Mai Asharalle Ali Makaho (*Wakar Mandula*—a provocative street song on marijuana)—and others provided Hausa youth with a vibrant entertainment space that, in the main, remained traditional and reflected Hausa social space up to the mid-1980s.

From the same pool also developed a core of traditional *soyayya* [romantic] musicians who provided templates for singing love lyrics to youth. The most prominent were Uwani Zakirai, Dan Mani Gumel and Haruna Uje. Uje (d. 2003), a truck driver-turned-musician (playing the *gurmi*), composed a love epic, *Jummai* in the 1970s which became an anthem for dreamy-eyed youth pleased at an unashamed expression of love by a lover and boldly played over the radio, to the frowns of culturalist establishment, confirming the significance of love themes in Hausa popular folk culture.

There were very few prominent female folk musicians. The most famous, in fact, was the late Uwaliya Mai Amada (1934-1983) a vocalist accompanied by an orchestra of women calabash musicians (led by her husband). Singing predominantly for women and especially during women-themed ceremonies, she carved a respectful niche for herself as an energetic, if often bawdy vocalist, as reflected in this excerpt from *Malam Ya Ga Wata*.

Allah ya yi Malam ya zo/ (chor) Malam ya ga wata/ Wannan ba malami ba ne/ Ya yi katakata ya ka sa tashi/ Ya yi lumu sai ya ka sa tashi/ Dadin yaro sai ya ka da malam/	Malam is here! (chor) He has eyed another one! Oh no, this is certainly not a Malam He is staggering, could not get up! He is limp, could not stand up [could not get it up] Malam is down with sheer ecstasy
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A clear reference to some amorous Qur'anic school Malams [marabouts] who used their position to exploit vulnerable women (it is almost always the women seeking psychological help from the marabouts, never the men), Uwaliya used the song to warn people of such marabouts.

Her mantle was sustained by a female contemporary Amada musician, as the calabash music was called, Barmani Coge (b. 1945) who used similar styles (and often the same songs) as Uwaliya. Often sarcastic, Barmani used her sharp lyrics to cock a snook at the various intrigues and vicissitudes of married life. And because she reflected so many women's innate moral struggle, she became an instant celebrity. Between the two of them, Uwaliya and Barmani provided entertainment fodder for well-heeled Hausa women during ceremonies.

However, with the introduction of the vibrant Hausa video film industry from 1990 based on templates from Bollywood Hindi films, a new music industry emerged in northern Nigeria centered around attempts to copy Hindi film soundtrack musicians that use male and female

voices in a dialogic form using synthesizer music. Since Hausa video films are virtually targeted at female audiences (due to their over-riding focus on romantic and domestic themes), female ‘background singers’ emerge, complete with high-pitched voices to mimic as much as possible, Lata Mangeskar, the hugely prolific Bollywood Hindi film soundtrack playback singer. These female singers, who became ‘mega-stars’ included Rabi Mustapha, Fati B. Muhammad, Maryam Mohammed Danfulani, Maryam “Sangandale” Abubakar, Maryam “Fantimoti” Saleh, Fati “Nijar” Labaran [the last being from the Republic of Niger].

Beggar-minstrels as Oral Poets

As I indicated earlier, there are at least four categories of Hausa musicians: Makadan Yaƙi [singing for armies], Makadan Fada [singing for traditional rulers], Makadan Sana’a [singing for occupational guilds] and Makadan Jama’a [popular folk singers who can sing for anyone who can pay; or sing on topical issues]. Almost all ethnomusicological studies of Hausa musicians (e.g. Erlman 1985; Furniss 1991, Besmer 1970, Ames 1973, Furniss 1996, Hill and Podstavsky 1976) fall into one of these categories. However, I created a fifth, more universal category, which I call *Mawaƙa Mabarata*, essentially *oral beggar poets*. It is this last category that beggar-minstrels belong. While studies of minstrel beggars in developing economies such as Bangladesh (Capwell 1974, Urban 2003, Unesco 2005, Datta 1978) and Ethiopia (Leslau 1952) indicate their use of musical instruments to accompany their street poetry, Hausa minstrels do not use any form of instrument. They use their voice in a call-and-response fashion to communicate their message.

Within the Hausa performing arts there are poets whose works were written and sung either by themselves or others without musical accompaniment. However, the vast majority of Hausa written poets were either social or political commentators (e.g. Sa’adu Zungur, Ali Aƙilu, Mudi Sipikin, Aliyu Namangi, Ahmadu Dan Matawalle, etc) and are studied in specific intellectual circles. Further, as Russell Schuh (1994: 1) notes,

Discussion of Hausa poetry has generally distinguished *oral* poetry, which finds its roots in ancient Hausa tradition, and *written* poetry, which dates from the 19th century and whose meters can be traced to Arabic Islamic verse. Though the large and continually evolving body of Hausa poetic literature derives from these separate origins, there has now been considerable cross-fertilization between the two traditions, both thematically and metrically. Moreover, the ‘oral’ vs. ‘written’ distinction is misleading.

Hausa beggar-minstrels are *oral poets*, and often do not *write* their own poems. In the initial development of the craft, these minstrels tend to rely on poems written by others. In this, they tended to focus almost exclusively on songs praising the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in various forms. Examples of these classical Islamic poetry recited by the Hausa beggar minstrels include *Ishriniyat* (originally composed by Abi Bakarim Muhammad bn Malikyyi bin Al Fazazi), *Hamziyya* and *Al-Burda* (Sharaf al-Din Muhammad al-Busiri). .

They are not *maroƙa* [praise singers] as the generality of Hausa musicians are perceived because they do not sing the praises of patrons for money; but *mabarata* [indigent beggars] because they are, literally and professionally, street-beggars. The distinction is very essential for creative purposes—and has led to this genre being ignored by mainstream Hausaist scholars. Further, their choice of subject—moral poetry—can be interpreted either as a protest against the worldly-orientation of the Hausa popular singers, or a ploy to garner sympathy from listeners and ensure

they are given alms. Even when departing from strictly religious or moral poetry, beggar-minstrels tend to focus on socially thematic issues. A very good example is the *Wakar Bagauda* (Hiskett 1963). Of unknown date and origin, the epic was made popular by beggar-minstrels, which attracted the attention of scholars—and thus led to the reconstruction of the history of Kano, northern Nigeria. Similarly, Aliyu Namangi's nine-volume *Imfiraji* was sustained not through publishing, but by beggar-minstrels, such as Kasimu Garba Takai 'Marar Idanu' (as he describes himself in Radio Jigawa recital of *Imfiraji* 3 in November 1996) and Hajiya Hafsat Sani Bello, a blind minstrel from Kofar Wambai, Kano.

Beggar-minstrel Performances

The Hausa beggar-minstrels in northern Nigeria usually move in groups of three adults and one or two children who serve as their guides ['dan jagora' – he who pulls by the stick] in a chain formation, making up a troupe of sorts. However, not all of them are blind, nor adults; I have recorded women beggar-minstrels, and a gaggle of street urchins performing similar minstrel songs. They do not use any form of musical accompaniment—thus separating them from normal *maroka* who often use one instrument or other

The three 'band members' of each troupe are made up of a Voice Master, who is the lead narrator, and two choirs. Their initial repertoire consisted of quoting verses from the Qur'an to merchants in the shops and market stalls they come up to, and they are given alms. They later included classical Arabic poetry in their set lists. Some of them developed a strong repertoire of performances for specialist audiences with the Voice Master telling longish stories with variety of themes. The other two pick up a central theme of the story as a single line, and repeat it continuously as a choir – thus the background vocals provide a sonic tapestry on which the main operatic story unfolds.

Their performance can last as long as the audience wants, or when the minstrels simply get tired and move on. They are given alms for these public performances. Besides street begging, the performances of the troupe also serve internal processes, i.e. the songs were performed only at events organized by the blind community—thus obviating the need to hire outside entertainers. This eventually attracted the attention of 'ma su ido' [the sighted] who also invite them to perform at their events. There are other occasions when some of the minstrels are often invited to perform to a specific audience or for a specific occasion (e.g. naming ceremony, or for a politician)—more often as a novelty, rather than creative recognition, especially as they have no music to dance to, but provide a source of laughter in their narrative—and they are paid handsomely for these performances.

Their main source of income, however, is from the street-begging. There is no centralized union for the minstrels, and indeed from my fieldwork with them, they do not seem to want to become organized as a trade union or a performance collective for that will bring unnecessary government attention to their more freeform creative performances. Thus each cluster of three minstrels would rather strike out on its own and hope to get lucky.

The main characteristic of the more popular compositions of the genre is its comedic structure. While a story is being told—complete with dialogue—comedy lines are introduced that elicit laughter from the audience – and greater appreciation and patronage.

The group of three minstrels is not always a permanent arrangement. The backing choir can follow a different Voice Master, either due to ‘creative differences’ or simply because a new singer offers a new way of performing and therefore more prosperity—or when the Voice Master dies. Curiously, none of the other two choir members indicate the desire to assume the mantle of the Voice Master.

The radio and television stations remain the only organized structures to provide them with opportunities to bring the attention of the wider community to their performances. However, at the beginning – late 1970s – even this facility was denied to them, perhaps because of their unkempt and dirty appearance. Eventually, however, they were allowed to appear on TV as novelty shows, giving them initial visual status when people see them live moving from one market stall to another singing the same songs they performed on television.

Muhammad Dahiru Daura Troupe

The most prominent of the northern Nigerian Muslim Hausa beggar-minstrels was the Dahiru Daura troupe. This was led by Muhammad Dahiru Daura, who was born in 1946 in Gombak village, Zangon Daura a border town with Niger Republic, in Katsina State, Nigeria. He died in Gawuna, Kano on 19th August 2010. He was 64. He started his operatic performances as a beggar-minstrel in 1976 at the age of 30. He studied, as it were, under the tutelage of Ado Dantaraunawa, another blind minstrel in his local government of Zangon Daura in Katsina State, before eventually moving to Kano State in the early 1970s.

I became fascinated with Dahiru Daura when I watched him perform live in the streets of Kano city in 1976 while I was an undergraduate at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and with deep interests in ethnomusicology. Since he had no specific *ubangida* (mentor) to fund his craft and enable his songs to be recorded and sold, you simply had to follow the troupe as they traipse from one shop to another to get the full taste of his performances. The operatic nature of his narrative provided a fascinating enough reason to follow them. The troupe were eventually brought to the studios of the local television stations in Kano, Nigeria, and recorded—which provided music pirates with an instant opportunity to record and sell the songs, without any benefit to the troupe. My analysis of the troupe started in 1995 and it was from a single tape recording of their songs which I eventually converted into an MP3. Not satisfied with the sound quality, and wanting to meet the troupe, I took a more proactive measure to record them on stage and in the studio.

To record the troupe’s catalog required three interviews with them. The first was on 1st January 2006 at the Center for Hausa Cultural Studies, Kano. This was followed by a live concert at the British Council in Kano where I recorded five performances of the troupe on video MiniDV tape. One of the compositions, *Idi Wanzami*, was accompanied, for the first time in the entire career of the troupe, with musical instruments by a band, Al-Muhajirun, engaged specifically for the event. Al-Muhajirun were unusual in Hausa music history in that not only did they craft their

own instruments from various types of woods and bamboo, but they were also a full band (which included two drums, flute, calabash, lute, and pierced calabash disks). Unfortunately, lack of local patronage and fierce competition from Hausa technopop music generated synthesizer sampled sounds prevented their progress, and the band folded up.

The second interview was on 31st December 2006 at their base in Gawuna. In both the two interviews Dahiru Daura was present and lead the interviews, providing most of the answers, with occasional interjection from Galadima AbdulWahab Sule, a consistent member of the troupe. In January 2011 I decided to formally record the troupe in a studio – being dissatisfied with the condenser microphone recordings I had been doing. Regretfully on getting to Muhammad Dahiru Daura’s house, his wife informed us he died on 19th August 2010. We traced his ‘band members’, locating only one, Galadima AbdulWahab Sule, who had joined another Voice Master, and held a third interview with the new Voice Master, Tafida Haruna Isma’il on 24th January 2011. Tafida knew Dahiru Daura and was very familiar with Daura’s catalogue, although he also has his own compositions. However, it was Galadima who provided more insight into their craft, with supporting explanations from the Tafida. The Galadima in fact was a civil servant, working in Gabasawa Local Government in Kano in the Special Education unit, and becomes part of a Voice Master choir on a part-time basis. At the end of the discussions, I asked if they had ever sung a tribute to Dahiru Daura – which they admitted they had not; however, right there and then, Tafida led a spontaneous moving eulogy which lasted for five minutes, detailing their sadness at the passing away of Muhammad Dahiru Daura, undoubtedly the most famous Voice Master among the Hausa beggar-minstrels.

On Monday 7th February 2011 we eventually booked Golden Goose Studios, Kano, where Tafida and his choirs recorded the entire known catalogue of Muhammad Dahiru Daura of eight compositions, in addition to a tribute to Dahiru Daura.

The Compositions

The repertoire of the Muhammad Dahiru Daura troupe, all sung *a capella* consisted of the following compositions (with length in minutes in bracket):

Idi Wanzami (21:39)	Enoch the Barber
Direba Makaho (20:37)	The Blind Driver [Driving Blindly]
Bayanin Willi (16:53)	Concerning Willi [a person who does not like the Prophet Muhammad (SAW)]
Bayanin Girki (12:59)	Concerning Dishes
Bayanin Naira (10:32)	Concerning Wealth
Bayanin Maitatsine (08:22)	Concerning Maitatsine [religious fundamentalist],
Bayanin Goro (07:46)	Concerning Kolanut
Bayanin Da’a (06:59)	Concerning Discipline
Bayanin Soja (05:45)	Concerning the Army

A distinct characteristic of his longer narratives is a powerful doxology which he uses to pray and introduce the his ‘band members’ as well as give a resume of the narrative to follow. I will briefly summarize the first three narratives because they are longer, more focused and structured in order to show how comedy is used by the group to communicate a vital moral message. The poems I will be analyzing are ‘Idi Wanzami’, ‘Direba Makaho’ and ‘Bayanin Willi’.

***Idi Wanzami* [Enoch the Barber/Enoch the Superstitious]**

Dahiru Daura's 'bakandamiya' [masterpiece] was the performance of *Idi Wanzami* [Enoch the Barber]. It was initially composed by another blind minstrel, Hamza Makaho [Hamza, the blind] from Damagaram, Niger Republic, who actually created the genre. The song was based on a real barber who lived in Gazawa [probably mispronounced Gagawa in the song], Damagaram. He was apparently a superstitious person – with one of his superstitions being his refusal to cut the hair of a blind person because of his belief that doing such will bring bad luck to his business. All entreaties to make him cut the hair of Hamza Makaho failed on deaf ears, as he flatly refused to cut the blind minstrel's hair. This angered the latter who then composed a 'zambo' [invective] song which he called 'Idi Wanzami' in which he lampooned the barber. Hamza Makaho went further, and recorded the song for broadcast at Radio Damagaram, and this became a massive hit throughout Niger republic and neighboring Nigeria. The barber's children apparently tried to get the Radio Station to delete the song, which the station refused to do since the song was already recorded on tapes by listeners. Thus *Idi Wanzami* was based on an already existing song by an earlier minstrel; however Dahiru Daura lengthened it considerably and introduced a series of comedy skits that accompanied the main performance, which became central motifs in all their performances. The choir refrain for this narration is 'baya batun imani' [he has no conception compassion].

***Direba Makaho* [The Blind Driver; Driving Blindly]**

Direba Makaho [Blind driver/driving blind] was an original composition. It was a devastatingly comedic analysis of recklessness of Nigerian drivers who endanger themselves and other road users. By ignoring highway codes and careful driving, they are actually driving 'blindly' – thus they are 'blind drivers'. The song starts with a narrative by the protagonist of his desire to quit begging after consultation with his choir. The craft they decided to enter is long-distance truck driving. They faced initial problems however, of getting someone to sponsor them enough to buy a truck. The narrative tells how they approached various groups, but were rebuffed. They even decided to approach insurance companies because 'su ne su ka gaji asara' [they are used to losing all the time] who eventually sponsored their purchase of a truck. The driver then narrated how he took it to the motor park, overloaded with goods and passengers, got dead drunk and drove off at top speed—leading to an accident in which only the driver escaped alive. The moral of the narrative is to caution driver on over speeding and overloading, and remaining sober while driving. The choir refrain here is 'ba kiliya ba canji' [driving carelessly].

Bayanin Willi

'Willi' is a made up name for a person who is not particularly generous. The protagonist links this lack of generosity with irreligiosity. The performance narrates how the protagonist and his choir go the market to beg. They eventually stop at the stall of a Willi, who becomes irritated with their recitation of classical Arabic poetry and asked them to stop. Their refusal to stop angers him and he decides to assault them. This makes them run away, with Willi in hot purchase. The performance then narrates how the protagonist seeks refuge in various places, but is instantly thrown out when Willi approaches due to his fearsome appearance and intensive cruelty. Willi eventually catches up with the protagonist who faces him and wrestles him to the ground. The

moral of the narrative is on the superior strength of spirituality; for while the antagonist (Willi) is weak, the protagonist (makaho, the blind) is imbued with spiritual strength—thus spirituality is the superior strength in any encounter. The choir refrain here is ‘ka ji bayanin Willi’ [this is the story of Willi].

Other Performances

The other performances in his repertoire are less epic, but nevertheless equally topical. They deal with various topics such as *Bayanin Girki* (an ode to food in which Dahiru describes various food items giving them Hausa names which leads to endless ribbing from mates if a person’s name is attached to an unsavory food item), *Bayanin Da’a*, a poem about discipline, composed to support the War Against Indiscipline of Nigeria’s military regime in mid 1980s. Indeed the use of beggar-minstrels to promote Nigerian government policies of social re-orientation shows one effective way their skills can be used for social mobilization. *Bayanin Naira* narrates how obsession for wealth creates mistrust and how acquisition of wealth leads to false friendship.

Muhammadu Dahiru Daura’s *Idi Wanzami*

I will now briefly analyze *Idi Wanzami* more closely to determine the structure of the narrative which characterizes the beggar-minstrel style in northern Nigeria. A longer excerpt is translated in the Appendix. In composing, reciting and performing *Idi Wanzami*, Dahiru does not seem to have used any recognizable style or meter—just his own inimitable style which he uses in all his other compositions.

The poem described the tribulations Dahiru underwent under Idi’s barbing razors when fate took him to Idi’s house to request for a haircut and facial grooming. It begins with Dahiru presenting himself and introducing his entire family and backing vocals as the protagonist. Somewhere along the line, he stresses his profession—*da bara a ka san mu* [we are better recognized as street-beggars], thus making it clear that he is requesting for alms, *fi sabillah* [for the sake of Allah], rather than payment for services. If the listener is entertained enough to give the alms, fine; if not, Dahiru simply moves on with his backing vocals to another listener. A distinct characteristic of his style was the use of distorted backing vocals that contains a refrain that in effect, summarizes the subject matter of the performance. The distorted vocals of the choir thus form a drone-like instrumentation in the background, on which Dahiru lays the main song.

The linguistic richness of the poem is also reflected in the way Dahiru uses Arabic-sounding words—as if invoking a particularly hellish litany on the barber;

Askar wanzami,/	The barber’s razor?
Ka ji ma sunan ta:/	Hear to its name:
‘warbabiyati burbat,/	‘warbabiyati burbat,
Summa barridi kal’!/ Summa barridi kal’!	Summa barridi kal’!

Dahiru uses an Arabic onomatopoetic meter in the expression, *warbabiyati burbat*, which has no specific meaning, but when spoken sounded sufficiently sadistic enough to evoke an image of tissue destruction, or bones being broken [*kal* is the sound of something being broken]. The Arabic language has provided the Hausa language with extensive loan-words, mainly due to scholastic Islam.

The narrative begins with a doxology that praises God, and then introduces the other band members. The protagonist then spends about five minutes describing Idi Wanzami’s operational procedures which shows the uncompassionate nature of the barber (thus the refrain, ‘baya batun imani – he is not compassionate’]. The Hausa barber in normal circumstances is a person feared by young boys [who are delighted with modern barbing saloons] due to his strength and the vice-like grip with which he holds a client’s head while cutting the hair with a razor that makes rasping sound as it sweeps across the cranium. Thus what the protagonist did was to take this imagery of childhood fear for barbing, and embellish it with real-life story of a barber who lacks any form of compassion for the suffering of his client.

After the openings, the protagonist then moves on narrate how he arrives at the town of Gagawa [Gazawa, Damagram, Niger Republic].

Ni ne wataran da na tashi/	One day I got up
Wataran da na sauka garin su/	One day I landed in his town
Ina yin yawo/	I was just wandering
Sai na sauka Faranshi/	I arrived in France [Niger republic]
Inna yin yawo/	I was wandering
Sai na je tashar Gagawa/	Then I arrived at the Gagawa [Gazawa bus station]

His narrative further emphasizes the wandering nature of his craft, since it even involved cross-border movement. Interestingly, he retained the general Hausa name given to Niger Republic—“Faranshi”—France since it was a former French colonial territory. On arrival in the town, he asks if there is a barber in town, because he needs a haircut and facial grooming. The people he asks tell him there is indeed a barber in the town, but even the residents are afraid to go to him. The protagonist insists and he is taken to the barber’s house. He announces himself with the usually greetings of ‘Assalamu Alaykum’ [peace on you] in front of the house. The barber ignores him. He calls out the greeting again, and still the barber ignores it. On the third call, the barber becomes annoyed and

Idi Wanzami/	Idi Wanzami
To daga can da ya motsa/	Then moved swiftly
Sai ya daka mini tsawa/	And shouted at me
Rannan da na rude/	I got scared
Rannan da ya daka mani tsawa/	When he shouted at me
Yo ni da na rude/	I become disoriented
Har igiyar wando ta tsinke!/	The belt of my trouser broke
‘Yan amshi suka tsorata/	My choir became frightened
Kan a jima sun je Dambatta!/	Before long had escaped to Dambatta [town in Nigeria]
Suka bar mu muna ta atanda/	Abandoning me with him!

With a quaking voice, the protagonist informs the barber he wants a haircut. The barber refuses due to his superstitious belief that he always get unlucky when cutting the hair of blind people.

Na ce, “Wanzami,/	I asked, “Barber
Mai ne ne ya yi zafi/	Why are you so extreme
Har ba kai wa makaho aski?"/	That you will cut a blind man’s hair?”

Ya ce, “Ai akwai dalili”/ In ya yi wa makaho aski/ Rannan baya samun sa’a/	He said, “there is a reason” If he cuts the hair of blind He runs out of luck that day
Na ce, “Wanzami, Amma ka cika camfi/ Ka san’a gun Allah/ Tabaraka Allah/ Shi ne mai kowa mai komai/ Sai Ya ba ka ka samu/ In Ya hanaka ba mai ba ka”/	I said, “Barber, You are too superstitious Seek for luck with Allah The most Blessed Allah He who owns everyone and everything If He gives, you get If He denies, no one can give
Ya ce, “Kai Malam, Wai ka zo aski ne, Ko kuma ka zo kai wa’azi ne?/ In ma wa’azin ne za kai/ Zauna ga turmi a gaban ka/ Kai ta yin wa’azin ka/ Mata su ba guntun tsaba”/ Amma tun da ya rantse/ Shi bai wa makaho aski/	He said, “Listen, Mister” Have you come for barbing For to preach? If you want to preach Sit down, here’s a pestle and mortar Do your preaching Women will reward you” But since he has sworn He will not a blind person’s hair

This segment records full dialogues of the interaction between the protagonist and the antagonist. Yet the protagonist himself reveals his superstitious side in the narrative. This is reflected in the way he switches from first-person to third-person narration when the dialogue involves uttering something spiritually unpalatable to him. An example is shown below:

Original narrative	Third Person	First-person transposition
Ya ce, “Ai akwai dalili”/ In ya yi wa makaho aski/ Rannan ba ya samun sa’a/	He said, “there is a reason” If <i>he</i> cuts the hair of blind <i>He</i> runs out of luck that day	He said, “there is a reason” If <i>I</i> cut the hair of blind <i>I</i> will run out of luck that day”

In the first-person transposition, the protagonist shifts the characters’ focus from the protagonist to the antagonist—because the dialogue of the antagonist is morally abhorrent to the protagonist, who will not accept uttering the expression ‘ba na samun sa’a’ [I don’t get lucky], as if such utterance would translate into real-time lack of luck for the protagonist.

The protagonist eventually persuades the barber to cut his hair, but not without making him go through a hellish experience during which the barbing becomes so painful that the protagonist starts to beg the barber to stop, who reluctantly agrees.

Conclusion

The craft of the beggar-minstrels in Nigeria has not shown much development from when it started in the 1970s. Indeed, with current transnational flow of media influences creating new genres of Hausa techno pop and rap music, minstrelsy is definitely a genre on its way out. Ignored by mainstream Hausa scholars and marketers, yet it provides a critical perspective on preservation of community theater

Reforming the Genre of Hausa Beggar-minstrel Oral Poetry

There are many ways in which this creative performance art form can be ‘globalized’ and oriented towards sustainable development—both to restore the dignity of the beggar-minstrels as performing artists, and also create a dynamic employment opportunities which harness their skills. These strategies may include the following:

1. Form a musician’s collective that recognizes minstrel music as an art form. This will involve ‘regularizing’ the minstrel performing arts as a form of art in its own right, motivated by the creative impulse of the artist, whether minstrel or not.
2. Re-orient minstrel music to focus on concepts and issues. This can be done by re-contextualizing the religious orientation of the minstrel songs; as well as by encouraging the minstrels to use the meter of their conventional songs.
3. Providing institutional empowerment for the minstrels, by treating their craft as an art form.
4. Creating linkages between the beggar-minstrels and structured language study centers to further enrich their popular usage and spread of Hausa language.
5. Suggesting more thematic subject matter for the beggar-minstrels, as can be done, for instance, in the case of Muhammadu Dahiru Daura.
6. Organizing regular workshops and seminars for the beggar-minstrels where they can share their experiences with each other, and form their own internal linkages.
7. Promoting beggar-minstrel music through structured marketing strategies such as tapes, CDs, Internet online stores, etc.
8. Professionalizing the craft of beggar-minstrel oral poetry by making them structured performing artists.
9. Providing short term training for the beggar-minstrels to further sharpen their skills, and thus gradually wean them away from street begging and orienting them to seeing oral poetry as an employment option

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Excerpts from Idi Wanzami

Ni ne fa Muhammadu Dahiru Daura/ Ni ne na Binta baban Audu/ Da bara aka san mu/ Ga kuma Audu da Audu/	I am Muhammad Dahiru Daura I am Binta's husband and Audu's father We renown as street beggars And here're Abdu and Abdul (choir)
Maganar Idi Wanzami/ Na tashar Gagawa/ Askin sa ya fi fida ciwo!/ Idi Wanzami, Ka ji yana yin askin/ Kamar ana fidar dan taure!/ Idi Wanzami, Aska da tausayi, shi babu/ Wai wanzaman kirki, Su na yawo da zabira/ Idi Wanzami, Sai ya zubo su a sanho/ Askan sa guda huɗu/ Ko wacce aska ga sunan ta: Daya 'kura kya ci da gashi',/ Daya 'ladan ki na jikin ki',/ Akwai wata 'wa aka samu?'/ Sannan ga 'kare dangi',/ Amma ita 'kare dangi',/ Idan ta fito daga sanho/ Rannan mutum dubu sa kare!/	This is about Idi Wanzami [the barber] Of Gagawa motor park Whose barbing is worse than being skinned Idi Wanzami When he is barbing As if they are cutting up a goat Idi Wanzami The knife is more merciful [than he is] You see, normal barbers Keep their razors in [zabira] duffel satchel Idi Wanzami Keeps his razors in a scabbard He has four razors Each has its own identity and name One is 'hyena, eat all' Another is 'your cut your own payment' There is another, 'who we do have here?' Then there's 'weapon of mass destruction' This weapon of mass destruction If ever it comes out of the scabbard It will do away with over 1,000 people
Idi na tashar Gagawa/ Akwai wata aska ta sa, Ka ji ta na daga sanho/ Amma ta cinye tsokar kai!/ Askar wanzami, Ka ji ma sunan ta: / 'warɓaɓiyati burbat, Summa barridi Kal'! Daya 'Kuljama'u jamila'/ 'Kuljama'u jamila?'/ Wannan ba a biya mata lada/ Da kanta ma ta diba!/ Idan ana yin askin, Rabi ta kwaso suma/ Sannan rabi ta debo nama!/ Idi, of tashar Gagawa There is another one of his razors While still in the scabbard It will remove a person's scalp! And the razor? Listen to its name 'warɓaɓiyati burbat, Summa barridi Kal'! Another is called 'Kuljama'u Jamila' Kulmaja jamila? Does not need any payment [when used] It will take its payment itself! When the razor is used in barbing It will remove half of the hair And half of the scalp!	